

A WEEK IN *Learning*

LESS STRESS – NO ULCERS

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It seems like there are more and more things we are stressing about today. This could be worrying about hitting our store quota for the day, posting enough merchandise online for e-commerce, or being double booked for two important meetings. You could even have stressors outside of work, such as a sick child you need to get home to right away. Stress just makes life that much harder, and it sucks the energy right out of us. How can we possibly handle all this?

Before I joined Goodwill of Central and Northern Arizona, I was in advertising for more years than I care to mention. When I first got in the business, I was warned about the stress of working in an advertising agency. After all, people in advertising were listed in the Top 10 Most Stressful Jobs in America, according to CareerCast.com, for years. That means we endure the same stress levels as firefighters and air traffic controllers. *Who knew?* Supposedly, working in an agency would wreak havoc on my health, psyche, personal time and kill my sense of humor.

Well, I'm happy to say that after many years in the business, I don't have an ulcer, I still have time for fun, and my sense of humor is probably better (it has to be in the ad business).

Why have I been so lucky? It's because of some invaluable advice given to me from people I have been fortunate to work with. Here are a few of the more important ones (IMHO) I continue to use:

Have a Morning Routine

Mornings can be vitally important for productivity, and many successful people swear by a consistent morning routine. By getting yourself in the correct frame of mind in the early hours, you can positively affect the output of your day. For example, Richard Branson (founder of Virgin Airlines) takes his mornings very seriously. *"No matter where I am in the world, I try to routinely wake up at around 5 a.m. By rising early, I'm able to do some exercise and spend time with my family, which puts me in a great mind frame before getting down to business."*

The key to morning routines is finding what works for you; exercise, cooking breakfast for your kids, listening to podcasts, or just soaking in the morning sunshine. If it feels good, do it.

Don't Go It Alone

As many wise men/women have said, *two heads are better than one and five heads are better than two*. Collaboration with others can help solve sticky problems, bring different perspectives, and is great for morale when pressure starts to build. So, don't be afraid to ask for help. You need your team to tackle all the challenges you face on a daily basis. It's even more critical to have consistent teamwork over time. Best-selling author and



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leadership coach Simon Sinek often refers to an old African Proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” I’m on board with that.

Stay On an Even Keel

One of my early mentors was Dan Pollick, founder of advertising agency Pollick & Associates. He noticed that I was a skittish, young ad account executive who reeked of stress. He told me that in order to survive in any business you have to try to stay on an even keel. It’s the drastic ups and downs that will kill you. Hit a home run? Celebrate and fully appreciate the joy, but don’t feel you’re bulletproof. Miss the mark badly on a project? Feel the pain and learn from it, but don’t go into a black hole of depression. Remember in business, whether it’s good or bad, it doesn’t last forever.

Manage Expectations

One of the best ways to take huge chunks of stress out your day is to properly manage expectations of others. Making an effort to keep people informed on what they can expect (timelines, costs, quality, process) and what is expected of them, can truly minimize negative consequences. By listening, planning, and communicating consistently with colleagues - you’ll be ahead of the game!

Find Common Ground

Sometimes, we just don’t seem to click easily with our team members. It’s no one’s fault, but it happens. In his book, “*Enchantment: The Art of Changing Hearts, Minds, and Actions*”, Guy Kawasaki advises to make things go smoother with the people you work with by making an effort to identify and share something in common. Honestly, finding common ground isn’t always easy. A while back, I had taken this advice into action with a difficult colleague of mine. Although it took weeks of trying, I finally discovered that we admired the same musician. I’ll tell you what - our working relationship improved *drastically* after we shared that tidbit. If you can find even one common thing to build on for a difficult working relationship, your days may be more bearable. Heck, it might even be more fun.

The Miracle of Chocolate

I’ve always had a desk drawer full of chocolates in my office. Research shows that dark chocolate boosts the production of feel-good chemicals, like endorphins. Plus, it boosts memory, attention span, reaction time, and problem-solving skills by increasing blood flow to the brain. By enjoying dark chocolate, or any chocolate really, dark clouds seem to dissipate. They are not really for me, but for my office mates who are welcome to snag a few for a quick pick me up during the day. We all know a happy team is a productive team.

I Love My Job

In reality, the biggest reason I survived in this crazy business without an ulcer is that I love what I do. The joys of what I accomplish with team members far outweigh any of the stresses that I deal with.

My stress reduction tips probably sound so simple, but they can be oh-so effective (Google them!). I hope that you can use some of these tips in your daily work life. Then maybe, just maybe, your life will be less stressful and ulcer free, too.